

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION 7W: Central

Covers counties:
Benton, Sherburne,
Stearns, and Wright

2019 REGIONAL PROFILE

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DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION CHANGE

Economic Development Region 7W – Central includes a total of 4 counties, located in the larger 13-county Central Minnesota planning region. Region 7W was home to 437,579 people in 2019, comprising 7.8 percent of the state’s total population. The region saw an 8.8 percent population increase since 2010, making it the second fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state, and is now the third largest in total population after gaining more than 35,000 new residents. Only the Twin Cities was larger and faster growing than Central. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 6.3 percent gain from 2010 to 2019 (Table 1).

	2010 Population	2019 Estimates	2010-2019 Change	
			Number	Percent
Region 7W	402,292	437,579	35,287	8.8%
Benton Co.	38,451	40,889	2,438	6.3%
Sherburne Co.	88,499	97,238	8,739	9.9%
Stearns Co.	150,642	161,075	10,433	6.9%
Wright Co.	124,700	138,377	13,677	11.0%
Minnesota	5,303,925	5,611,179	335,707	6.3%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates](#)

All four counties in the region saw population gains since 2010, led by Wright County, which was the third fastest growing county in the state and is now the 10th largest with 138,377 people. Sherburne County was the fifth fastest growing and is now the 12th largest in the state, with 97,238 people. Stearns County is the seventh largest with 161,075 people, and was the 13th fastest growing after welcoming 10,433 new residents. Benton County is the smallest in the region with 40,889 people, but is the 24th largest in the state and was the 14th fastest growing from 2010 to 2019. These recent gains are part of a long-term trend in the region, which has been adding population rapidly since 1950.

COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

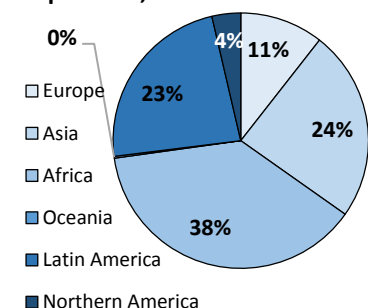
With a young and fast-growing population, Region 7W experienced a natural increase – more births than deaths – of 27,230 people so far this decade. In addition, the region gained residents from in-migration, with 8,255 more people moving into the region than moving out. A smaller amount of domestic in-migration occurred than international, but still amounted to roughly 2,000 more residents from domestic in-migration. The region experienced larger in-migration from international sources than it did from domestic residents, adding 6,359 more people (Table 2).

	Total Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter- national	Domestic
Region 7W	35,297	27,230	51,195	23,965	8,255	6,359	1,896
Minnesota	335,705	250,488	637,356	386,868	88,161	114,414	-26,253

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program](#)

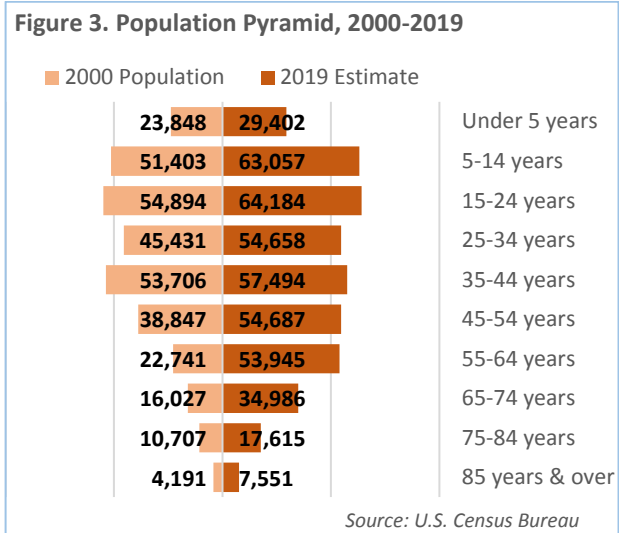
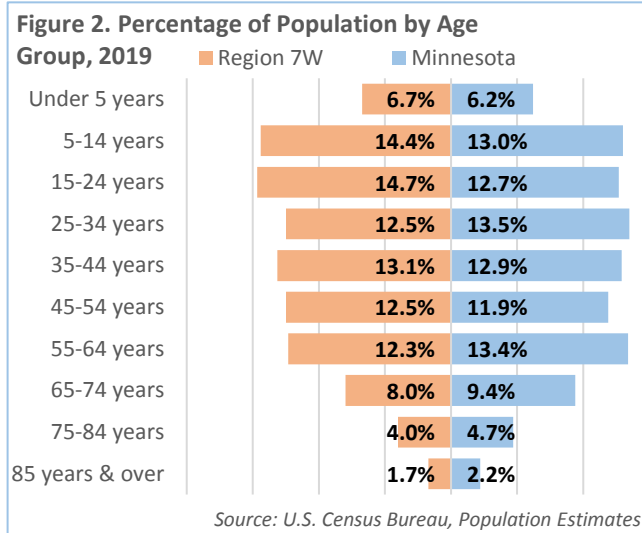
As such, Region 7W is now home to 18,946 foreign born residents, or about 4.5 percent of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 60.5 percent since 2010, more than doubling the statewide growth rate of 25.8 percent. Over one-third (7,204 people) of these immigrants were from Africa, while the second largest number of foreign born residents were from Central and Latin America, accounting for just over one fourth of immigrants. The fastest growing wave of new immigrants to Region 7W came from Africa, rising by 5,498 people from 2010 to 2018, a 322 percent jump, while the number from Central and Latin America increased about 21 percent. Another one-quarter of immigrants were from Asia, after increasing about 14 percent since 2010, and about 11 percent were from Europe and 3.6 percent were from Canada (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Place of Birth for the Foreign Born Population, 2018



POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

Region 7W's population is younger than the state's, with 36 percent of the population aged 24 years and younger in 2018, compared to 32 percent statewide. Another 38.1 percent of people in Region 7W were between 25 and 54 years of age, which is typically considered the "prime working years," the same percent statewide. In contrast, Region 7W had a smaller percentage of people from 55 to 64 years of age, and a much smaller percentage of the population aged 65 years and over than the state, with just 13.7 percent of people aged 65 years and over, compared to 16.3 percent of residents statewide (Figure 2).

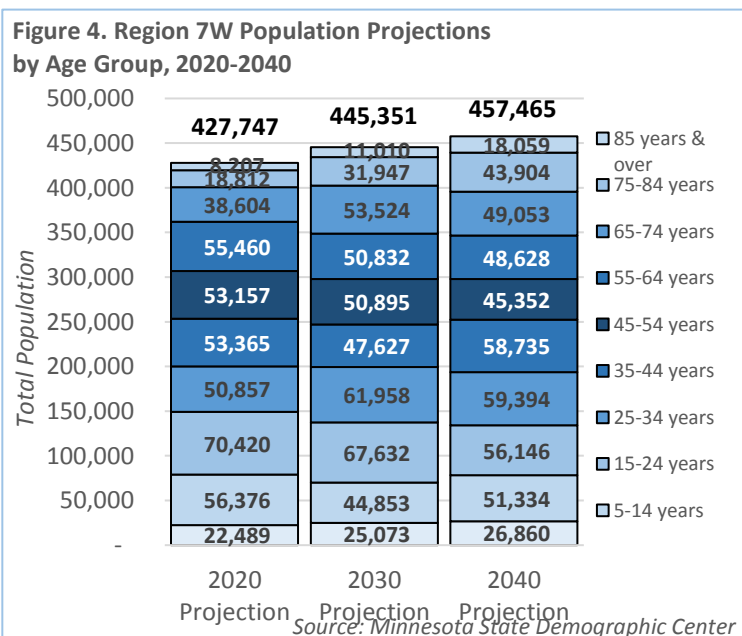


A large portion of the region's population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was rising steadily, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was rapidly increasing. This included a huge jump in the number of people from 45 to 64 years of age, and a 95 percent increase in people aged 65 years and over (Figure 3).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP

Region 7W is projected to enjoy continued growth in the future as well. According to the [State Demographic Center](#), Region 7W is expected to gain about 30,000 net new residents from 2020 to 2040, a 6.9 percent increase (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 8.8 percent from 2020 to 2040.

Despite the region's younger population, much of this demographic growth is expected to be in the older age groups. Region 7W is projected to add 45,000 people aged 65 years and over, a 69 percent increase. The region is also expected to gain about 14,000 people in the 25- to 44-year-old age group, as well as about 4,400 children under 5.



POPULATION BY RACE

Region 7W's population is less diverse than the state's, but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2018, 91.8 percent of the region's residents reported white alone as their race, compared to 83.3 percent of residents statewide. Region 7W had a smaller percentage of all other race groups than the state, with the largest minority populations being Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American (Table 3).

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2018	Region 7W				Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2000-2018 Numeric Percent		Percent	Change from 2000-2018
Total	422,574	100.0%	100,779	31.3%	100.0%	12.4%
White	387,888	91.8%	76,760	24.7%	83.3%	4.7%
Black or African American	14,319	3.4%	12,158	562.6%	6.2%	99.3%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,506	0.4%	439	41.1%	1.1%	7.3%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	6,554	1.6%	3,207	95.8%	4.8%	83.8%
Some Other Race	4,304	1.0%	2,953	218.6%	1.8%	48.7%
Two or More Races	8,003	1.9%	5,262	192.0%	2.9%	90.7%
Hispanic or Latino origin	12,247	2.9%	8,410	219.2%	5.3%	104.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

With 37.9 percent of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Region 7W has lower educational attainment than the state, where 43.7 percent of adults have an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree. In contrast, Region 7W has a higher percentage of people with some college but no degree, and a higher percentage of people with associate's degrees, but a lower percent of people with a bachelor's degree or higher (Table 4).

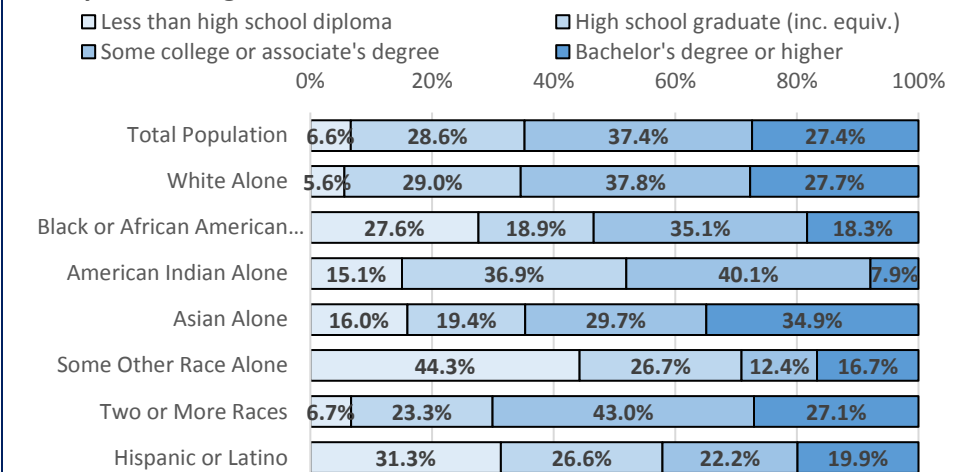
Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Adult Population, 2018	Region 7W		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total Population, 18 years & over	313,704	100.0%	100.0%
Less than high school	22,053	7.0%	7.6%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	88,914	28.3%	25.3%
Some college, no degree	83,946	26.8%	23.4%
Associate's degree	41,101	13.1%	10.8%
Bachelor's degree	55,981	17.8%	22.1%
Advanced degree	21,709	6.9%	10.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014-2018 American Community Survey

Educational attainment varied significantly by race and ethnicity in Region 7W. For example, 94 percent of the white alone population reported having at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to just 56 percent of adults of Some Other Race and less than 70 percent of Hispanic or Latino residents. Likewise, more than a quarter (27.6%) of Black or African American residents in the region had not completed a high school

diploma by age 25. In contrast, a higher percentage of American Indians and people of Two or More Races had attended some college, or earned an associate's degree than whites; while nearly 35 percent of Asian residents had earned a bachelor's degree or higher (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Educational Attainment for the population aged 25 years & over by Race or Origin, 2018



Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey

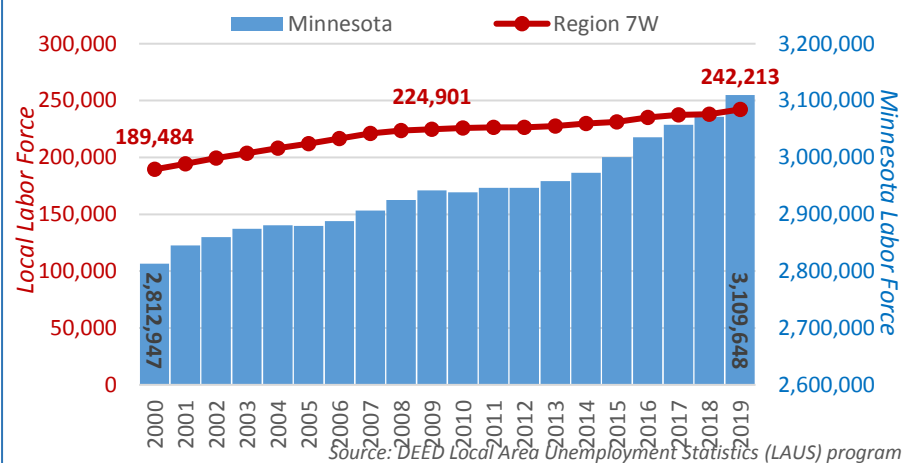
LABOR FORCE

LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED's [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Region 7W had an annual average labor force count of just over 242,000 workers in 2019. The regional labor force has increased rapidly since 2004, adding 34,129 new workers over the past 15 years. As such, the labor force in Region 7W actually reached a new peak in 2019, and is still seeing growth (Figure 6).

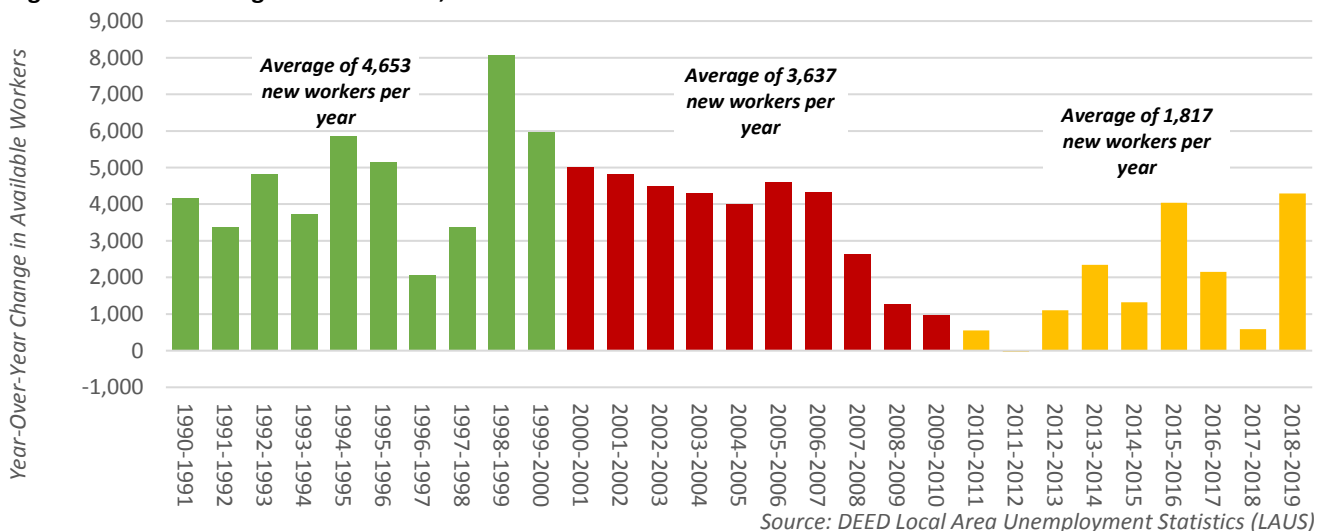
Region 7W is seeing increasing labor force growth recently, adding 14,282 workers from 2005 to 2012, and then 15,840 more workers from 2012 to 2019. Despite recent gains, the labor market in Region 7W continues to tighten, with fewer unemployed workers available. There were about 7,385 unemployed workers in 2019, down from a high of more than 19,000 unemployed workers during the Great Recession in 2009. These labor force constraints will have a substantial impact on the regional economy.

Figure 6. Annual Labor Force Estimates, 2000-2019



Averaging a net gain of 4,653 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Region 7W were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. Although the regional labor force and economy continue to grow, the rate of labor force growth is slowing down considerably, demonstrated by Region 7W adding an average of only 1,817 workers per year from 2010 to 2019 (Figure 7). Increasingly tight labor markets and a growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth in Region 7W. In the face of these constraints, it has become evident that a more diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, and immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of the workers that employers need to succeed. As the white, native-born workforce continues to age, younger workers of different races or from different countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force.

Figure 7. Annual Change in Labor Force, 1990-2019



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group, as shown in Figure 4 above, would lead to a smaller increase in workforce numbers in Region 7W through 2030 (Table 5).

In addition to the slowing growth, the labor force will also see a significant shift in composition over time, with sizable gains in the number of workers aged 65 years and over against huge declines in the number of workers aged 45 to 64 years. The region is also projected to lose teenaged workers.

However, the region is expected to see steady gains in the number of workers aged 20 to 44 years, and the 25 to 54 year old age group will still be the largest part of the labor force, still accounting for about 59 percent of the total workforce. This will likely lead to a tight labor market in the future as well, with employers needing to respond to the changing labor force availability in the region.

	2020 Labor Force Projection	2030 Labor Force Projection	2020-2030 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	15,896	13,881	-2,015	-12.7%
20 to 24 years	31,964	33,270	1,305	4.1%
25 to 44 years	93,172	97,967	4,794	5.1%
45 to 54 years	47,988	45,946	-2,042	-4.3%
55 to 64 years	40,703	37,307	-3,397	-8.3%
65 to 74 years	9,879	13,697	3,818	38.6%
75 years & over	1,712	2,722	1,010	59.0%
Total Labor Force	241,314	244,788	3,474	1.4%

Source: calculated from [MN State Demographic Center projections](#), and [2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#).

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 72.8 percent of the population aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Region 7W had the highest labor force participation rate of the 13 regions in the state and was higher than the state's 69.7 percent. The region had higher participation rates than the state in all of the age groups, except 65 to 74 year old workers (Table 6).

However, the region had lower participation rates than the state for a number of races such as Blacks, American Indians, and some other race. The highest unemployment rates were reported for Black or African Americans and workers of two or more races. Region 7W also had 11,343 workers with disabilities in the workforce, despite lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates.

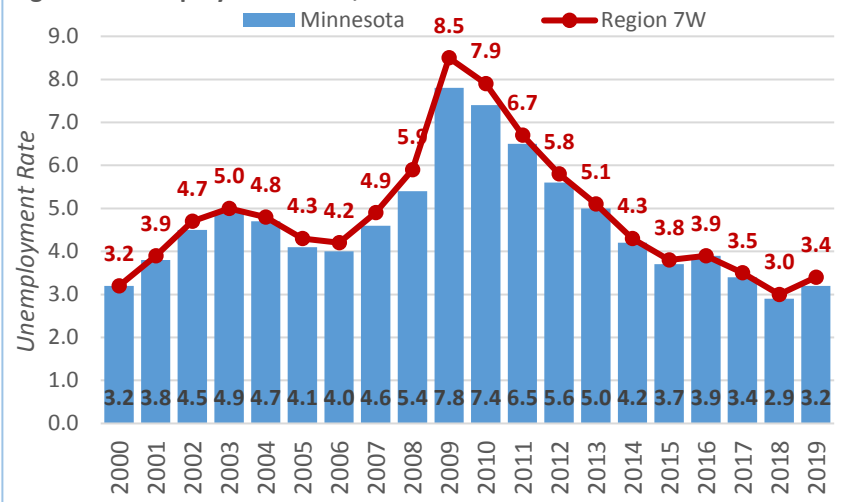
Age Group	Region 7W			Minnesota	
	Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate
Total Labor Force	237,425	72.8%	3.9%	69.7%	3.9%
16 to 19 years	14,921	58.8%	11.2%	52.9%	11.7%
20 to 24 years	27,426	87.3%	6.3%	84.4%	6.4%
25 to 44 years	97,688	89.4%	3.6%	88.6%	3.5%
45 to 54 years	51,343	90.3%	2.3%	87.3%	2.8%
55 to 64 years	36,792	73.4%	2.4%	72.6%	3.0%
65 to 74 years	7,815	25.6%	1.4%	27.6%	2.4%
75 years & over	1,425	6.3%	2.7%	6.3%	2.6%
Employment Characteristics by Gender					
Male	124,938	76.0%	4.4%	73.5%	4.3%
Female	112,482	69.5%	3.2%	66.0%	3.4%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin					
White alone	221,275	72.9%	3.4%	69.5%	3.3%
Black or African American	6,734	70.6%	13.5%	70.7%	9.9%
American Indian & Alaska Native	465	44.6%	8.2%	58.5%	12.8%
Asian or Other Pacific Islanders	3,982	77.1%	8.3%	71.3%	4.7%
Some Other Race	1,971	76.8%	4.4%	77.2%	6.2%
Two or More Races	3,061	73.7%	9.1%	73.1%	7.6%
Hispanic or Latino	6,023	78.3%	5.5%	76.3%	6.5%
Employment Characteristics by Disability					
With Any Disability	11,343	55.5%	8.4%	52.5%	9.0%
Employment Characteristics by Veteran Status					
Veterans, 18 to 64 years	9,449	81.8%	4.0%	79.2%	4.2%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment					
Population 25 to 64 years	185,729	85.9%	3.0%	84.2%	3.2%
Less than H.S. Diploma	8,020	71.8%	4.2%	65.4%	4.5%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	44,428	80.9%	2.6%	78.6%	2.6%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	76,438	87.5%	2.6%	85.2%	3.2%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	56,924	90.7%	1.8%	89.8%	1.9%

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Region 7W has consistently reported similar unemployment rates to the state, typically hovering just slightly above but within 0.2 percent of the state rate. According to DEED's [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), Region 7W's rate rose as high as 8.5 percent in 2009, which was 0.7 percent above the state rate. Since then, the state and region's economies have recovered and unemployment rates have dropped, with Region 7W hitting 3.0 percent in 2018, which was 0.1 percent above the state rate (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Unemployment Rates, 2000-2019

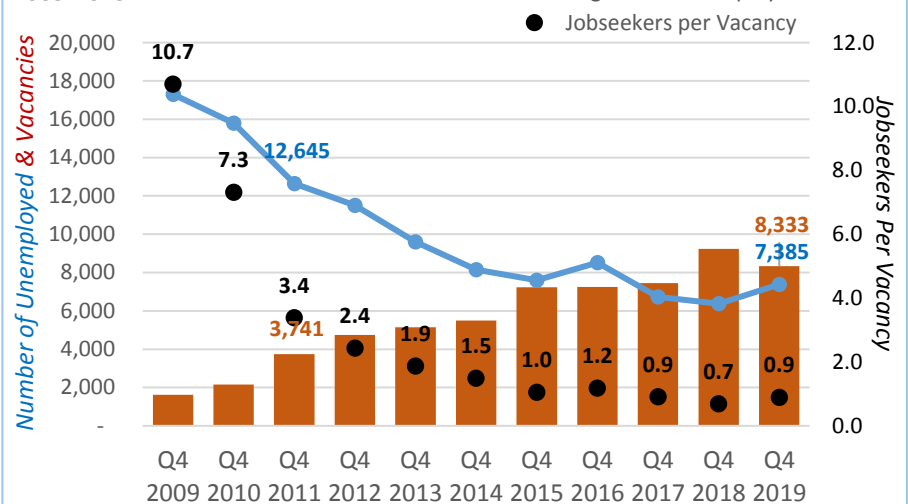


Source: DEED Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program

JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY

As the growth in the number of available workers has slowed and the number of unemployed workers has dropped, the region's labor market has tightened. One clear demonstration of this is the ratio of unemployed jobseekers per vacancy, which now stands at 0.9-to-1 in Region 7W. According to recent Job Vacancy Survey results, there were 8,333 openings reported by employers compared to 7,385 unemployed jobseekers in the region. The ratio climbed as high as 10.7-to-1 in the depths of the recession in 2009 (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Jobseekers Per Vacancy, 2009-2019



Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey, LAUS program

COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED

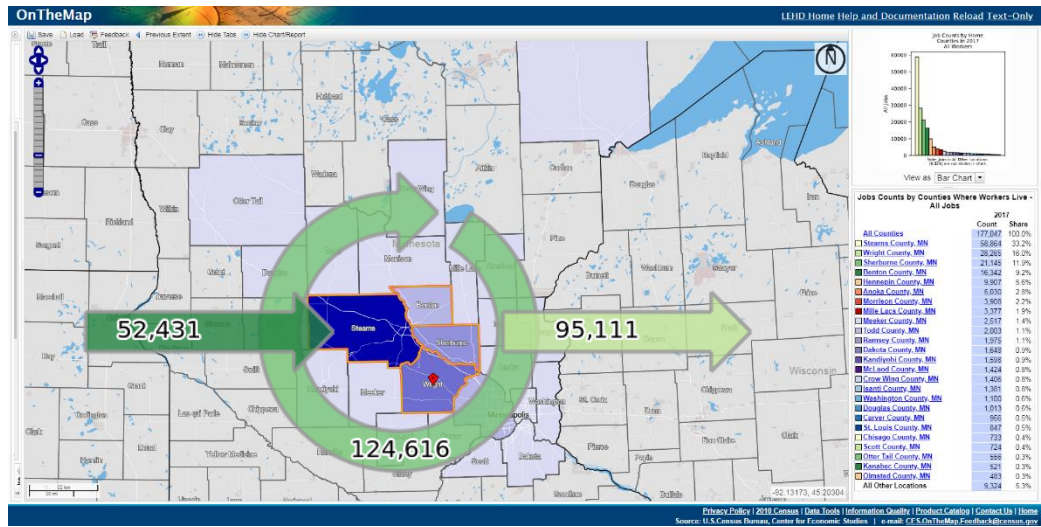
According to commuting data from the [Census Bureau](#), Region 7W is a net labor exporter, having more workers than available jobs. In fact, nearly as many residents commute out of the region than stay in the region for work. In sum, 124,616 workers both lived and worked in Region 7W in 2017, while 52,431 workers drove into the region from surrounding counties for work, compared to 95,111 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work (Table 7).

Table 7. Region 7W Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (All Jobs), 2017	2017	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	177,047	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	52,431	29.6%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	124,616	70.4%
Living in the Selection Area	219,727	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	95,111	43.3%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	124,616	56.7%

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#), [OnTheMap](#)

Anchored by St. Cloud, Stearns is the largest county and the largest employment center in the region and was the biggest draw for workers, actually seeing a net import of workers. In contrast, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright had significant labor outflows, primarily into the Twin Cities metro area as well as St. Cloud (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Region 7W Labor and Commute Shed, 2017



INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

Household incomes were slightly higher in Region 7W than the rest of the state. The median household income in Region 7W was \$71,875 in 2018, compared to \$68,411 in Minnesota. About 35 percent of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2018, compared to 36 percent statewide. Another 33.6 percent of households earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the region. Beyond that, another 31.8 percent of households in Region 7W earned over \$100,000 per year, closely following the percent of households statewide (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Household Incomes, 2018

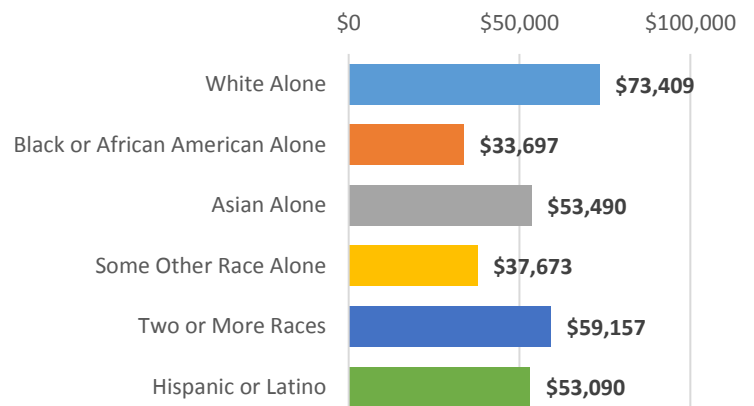
Less than \$25,000 \$25,000-\$49,999 \$50,000-\$74,999
 \$75,000-\$99,999 \$100,000-\$149,999 \$150,000 or more

Region 7W	14.3%	20.3%	18.2%	15.4%	19.8%	12.0%
Minnesota	16.1%	20.3%	18.0%	14.0%	17.2%	14.3%

Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Median household income varied by race or origin in the region. Whites accounted for over 94 percent of households reporting incomes in 2018, and had the highest median income level. Black or African American households reported the lowest incomes in Region 7W, with a median of \$33,697, which is less than half of the white alone median household income (Figure 12). Median incomes for minority races was highest for Asians at \$53,490 below that of Whites. Hispanic or Latino households and households of two or more races were significantly higher than Black or African American households at roughly \$53,000 per year.

Figure 12. Median Household Income by Race, 2018



Source: 2014-2018 American Community Survey

COST OF LIVING

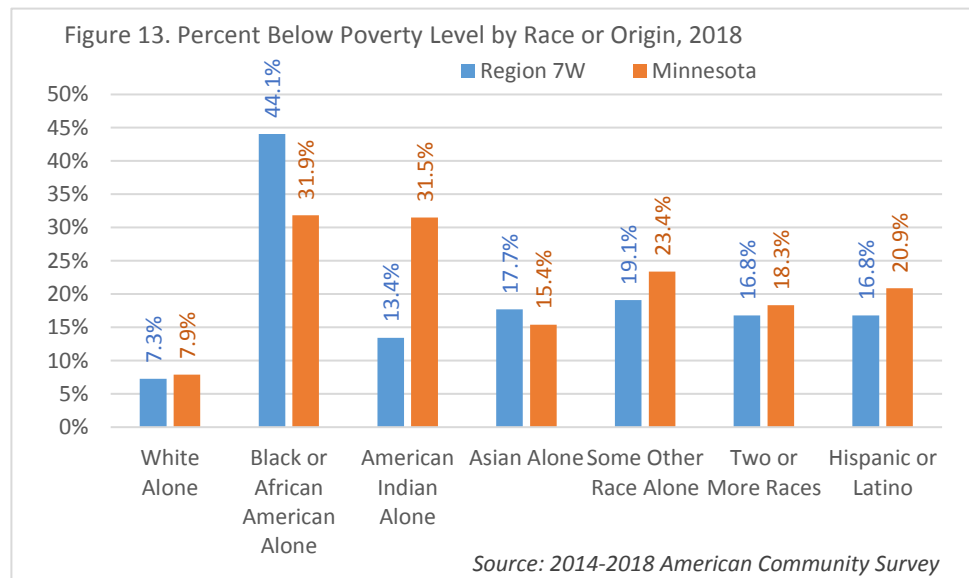
According to DEED's [Cost of Living tool](#), the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was \$56,772 in 2019. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 7W was \$54,708 – which was the third highest of the 13 economic development regions in the state, behind the Twin Cities metro area and Region 7E. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, housing, and food. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would need to earn \$17.53 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week.

DEED's Cost of Living tool provides estimates for household compositions including single people, partnered couples, and up to 4 children. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Region 7W would be \$32,160, which would require an hourly wage of \$15.46 to meet the basic needs standard of living (Table 8). That was also third highest in the state.

Table 8. Region 7W Cost of Living, 2019										
Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Region 7W										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$32,160	\$15.46	\$0	\$327	\$158	\$811	\$697	\$319	\$368
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$49,212	\$23.66	\$707	\$484	\$366	\$1,031	\$702	\$425	\$386
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$54,708	\$17.53	\$353	\$748	\$601	\$1,031	\$810	\$499	\$517
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$80,832	\$19.43	\$1,264	\$977	\$610	\$1,472	\$853	\$687	\$873
State of Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$31,392	\$15.09	\$0	\$336	\$157	\$798	\$653	\$318	\$354
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$56,772	\$18.20	\$516	\$769	\$593	\$1,033	\$755	\$505	\$560
Source: DEED Cost of Living tool										

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

Overall, Region 7W's poverty rate was 8.9 percent, which was just below the statewide rate of 10.1 percent. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that over 44 percent of the region's Black or African American population was below the poverty level in 2018, compared to just 7.3 percent of the White population. Likewise, poverty levels hovered over 15 percent for Asians, people of some other race, people of two or more races, and people of Hispanic or Latino origin. Only 13.4 percent of American Indians were below the poverty level in 2018. In all cases except for Blacks, the region's poverty rate was lower than the state's poverty rate, a reflection of the higher household incomes as noted above (Figure 13).



WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED's [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 7W was \$19.46 in the first quarter of 2020, which was the fifth highest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. Region 7W's median wage was \$2.03 below the state's median hourly wage, equaling 91 percent of the statewide wage rate, and \$3.84 below the median hourly wage in the 7-County Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to almost \$8,000 per year for a full-time worker. Region 7W had much higher wages than surrounding regions like Region 4, 5, and 6E, but lower wages than Region 7E (Table 9).

Eleven percent of jobs in Region 7W were production occupations, which was much more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Based on location quotients, Region 7W also had a higher share of workers in construction and extraction; education, training, and library; installation, maintenance, and repair; transportation and warehousing; and sales occupations. The largest employing occupational group was office and administrative support (Table 10).

Table 9. Occupational Employment Statistics by Region, 1 st Qtr. 2020	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
EDR 1 - Northwest	\$19.11	38,810
EDR 2 - Headwaters	\$18.57	32,750
EDR 3 - Arrowhead	\$19.03	144,320
EDR 4 - West Central	\$18.66	90,000
EDR 5 - North Central	\$17.50	61,880
EDR 6E - Southwest Central	\$18.41	49,370
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$18.02	32,970
EDR 7E - East Central	\$19.81	46,480
EDR 7W - Central	\$19.46	182,890
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$17.91	53,190
EDR 9 - South Central	\$18.75	99,570
EDR 10 - Southeast	\$19.89	242,490
EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities	\$23.30	1,805,980
State of Minnesota	\$21.49	2,880,650

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics](#)

Table 10. Occupational Employment Statistics, 2020							
Occupational Group	Region 7W				State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$19.46	182,890	100.0%	1.0	\$21.49	2,880,650	100.0%
Office & Administrative Support	\$19.19	22,580	12.3%	1.0	\$20.03	363,800	12.6%
Production	\$18.54	19,960	10.9%	1.5	\$19.03	212,650	7.4%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$17.71	19,840	10.8%	1.4	\$18.06	216,890	7.5%
Sales & Related	\$14.36	19,130	10.5%	1.1	\$15.37	277,000	9.6%
Education, Training & Library	\$25.40	15,000	8.2%	1.4	\$24.38	165,310	5.7%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$33.21	11,900	6.5%	1.0	\$36.07	190,800	6.6%
Construction & Extraction	\$28.55	10,180	5.6%	1.5	\$28.97	104,900	3.6%
Management	\$45.77	8,990	4.9%	0.8	\$52.70	170,650	5.9%
Healthcare Support	\$14.97	8,700	4.8%	0.8	\$14.81	163,160	5.7%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$23.13	8,430	4.6%	1.3	\$24.31	100,060	3.5%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$12.04	7,390	4.0%	0.5	\$12.43	244,300	8.5%
Business & Financial Operations	\$30.33	6,960	3.8%	0.6	\$33.87	171,550	6.0%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$15.18	5,290	2.9%	1.0	\$15.23	83,860	2.9%
Personal Care & Service	\$13.00	3,830	2.1%	0.9	\$13.65	70,290	2.4%
Computer & Mathematical	\$32.14	3,250	1.8%	0.5	\$42.71	97,960	3.4%
Community & Social Service	\$24.77	2,640	1.4%	0.7	\$23.34	57,200	2.0%
Protective Service	\$26.38	2,510	1.4%	0.9	\$22.45	45,030	1.6%
Architecture & Engineering	\$34.05	2,420	1.3%	0.7	\$38.00	55,520	1.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$21.20	2,030	1.1%	0.8	\$24.52	38,540	1.3%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$31.58	1,040	0.6%	0.6	\$34.35	27,070	0.9%
Legal	\$29.84	670	0.4%	0.5	\$37.35	20,050	0.7%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$17.69	160	0.1%	0.6	\$17.72	4,060	0.1%

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2020](#)

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are in food preparation and serving, personal care and service, sales, and healthcare support, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Region 7W and the state is lower in these jobs. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in management, computer, business and financial operations, healthcare practitioners, and architecture and engineering occupations, which all need higher levels of education and experience, including many that require postsecondary training. The pay gaps between the region and state are much bigger in these occupations.

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Region 7W reported 9,483 job vacancies in the fourth quarter of 2019, the second highest number ever reported. The region has averaged nearly than 8,000 vacancies over the past 3 years of surveys, an unprecedented level of consistent and strong demand, before hitting new record numbers in 2018.

Overall, 47 percent of the openings were part-time, and just 24 percent required postsecondary education. The percent of job openings requiring a college degree has seemingly been going down over time, while the percentage needing prior work experience has been higher and going up. In the fourth quarter of 2019, 38 percent of vacancies required 1 or more years of experience.

The median hourly wage offer for all occupations was \$16.78, but ranged from \$12.11 for protective service jobs; to more than \$28 per hour for management, computer and mathematical, architecture and engineering, life, physical, and social sciences, and business and financial operations occupations. The largest number of vacancies were for building, grounds cleaning and maintenance, food prep and serving, and sales and related, workers – those three occupation groups offered 43 percent of all vacancies in the region (Table 11).

Table 11. Region 7W Job Vacancy Survey Results, 4th Qtr. 2019

	Number of Total Vacancies	Percent Part-time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Post-Secondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Experience	Requiring Certificate or License	Median Hourly Wage Offer
Total, All Occupations	9,483	47%	22%	24%	38%	34%	\$16.78
Management	145	1%	1%	47%	97%	31%	\$29.45
Business & Financial Operations	271	0%	0%	76%	29%	4%	\$28.68
Computer & Mathematical	121	1%	0%	90%	99%	8%	\$43.28
Architecture & Engineering	43	3%	0%	94%	91%	25%	\$30.09
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	25	0%	25%	88%	84%	88%	\$30.15
Community & Social Service	127	35%	9%	46%	65%	75%	\$17.24
Education, Training & Library	284	58%	73%	73%	84%	92%	\$16.16
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	69	66%	18%	28%	30%	75%	\$17.44
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	499	35%	3%	80%	41%	97%	\$21.27
Healthcare Support	453	70%	2%	20%	16%	76%	\$14.38
Protective Service	35	69%	24%	10%	54%	64%	\$12.11
Food Preparation & Serving Related	1,265	60%	7%	3%	35%	15%	\$13.43
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	1,424	92%	84%	0%	15%	4%	\$26.43
Personal Care & Service	696	76%	8%	2%	9%	58%	\$12.27
Sales & Related	1,365	35%	17%	5%	27%	2%	\$14.60
Office & Administrative Support	617	52%	11%	19%	59%	9%	\$15.92
Construction & Extraction	658	5%	8%	85%	97%	95%	\$29.32
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	333	16%	0%	12%	43%	25%	\$16.77
Production	613	5%	0%	23%	36%	6%	\$14.99
Transportation & Material Moving	406	43%	19%	1%	30%	79%	\$17.86

Source: [DEED Job Vacancy Survey, Qtr. 4 2019](#)

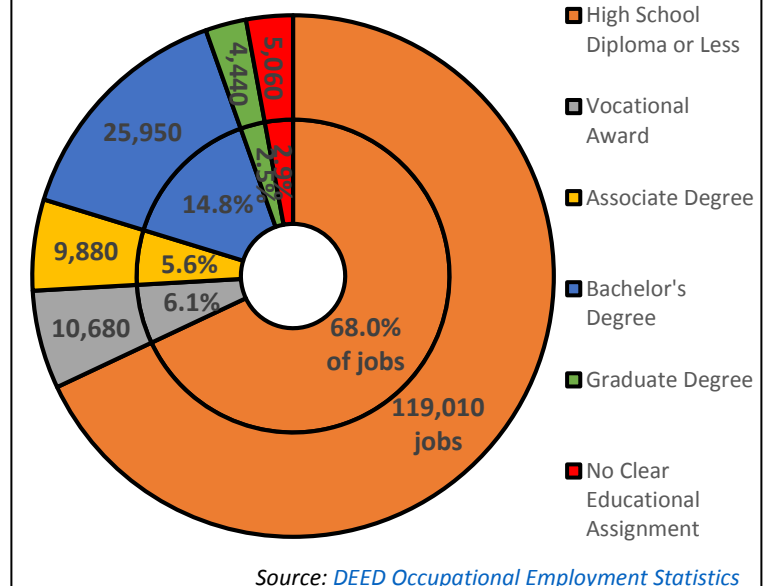
EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED's Occupational Employment Statistics program shows that about 30 percent of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 70 percent can be started with a high school diploma or less and some on-the-job training (Figure 14).

Certain careers – such as dentists, lawyers, and teachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including cost estimators, sales representatives, and correctional officers – do not. College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to fields that would otherwise be closed, such as nursing or engineering. Many of these occupations offer high wages and are in high demand in the marketplace.

While education is typically a worthwhile investment, college can be expensive – with average annual expenses ranging between \$14,500 and almost \$50,000 per year in Minnesota. For those who go to college, choice of major matters – different programs lead to different jobs that earn different amounts of money.

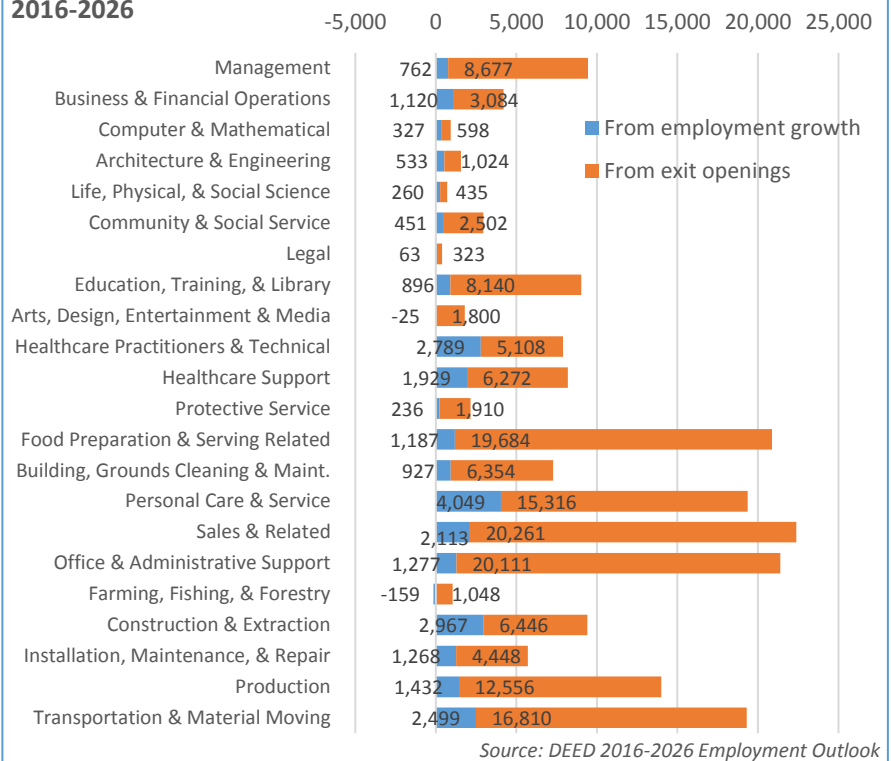
Figure 14. Region 7W Share of Jobs by Educational Requirements, 2019



EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Region 7W is part of the 13-county Central Minnesota planning area, which is projected to grow 8.6 percent from 2016 to 2026, a gain of 26,629 new jobs. That is the fastest of the 6 planning regions in the state. In addition, the region is also expected to need 157,485 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements and other career changers. Personal care and service, construction and extraction, transportation and material moving, sales and related, and healthcare support and practitioners are expected to see the most new growth, but every occupational group will show some future demand either through new jobs or replacement openings (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Central Minnesota Employment Projections, 2016-2026



OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees. Many of the occupations in demand in the region require a high school diploma or less. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region's major industries. For example, food prep workers, personal care aides and home health aides, retail sales workers, truck drivers, information technology, welders, and healthcare practitioners are all occupations in demand based on the consistent need for these workers (Table 12).

Less than High School	High School or Equivalent	Some College or Assoc. Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Retail Salespersons (\$25,362)	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (\$48,425)	Registered Nurses (\$77,526)	Elementary School Teachers (\$57,806)
Personal Care Aides (\$26,819)	First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers (\$41,149)	Nursing Assistants (\$35,265)	Secondary School Teachers (\$58,086)
Combined Food Prep & Serving Workers (\$23,801)	Teacher Assistants (\$30,937)	Licensed Practical Nurses (\$46,876)	Software Developers, Applications (\$85,496)
Cashiers (\$24,482)	Carpenters (\$50,024)	Automotive Service Techs. & Mechanics (\$39,870)	Accountants & Auditors (\$60,319)
Stock Clerks & Order Fillers (\$25,685)	First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep Workers (\$36,181)	Heating, Air Cond, (HVAC) & Refrig. Mechanics (\$51,059)	Human Resources Specialists (\$56,611)
Janitors & Cleaners (\$29,692)	Welders, Cutters, Solderers, & Brazers (\$46,676)	Machinists (\$49,847)	Construction Managers (\$78,625)
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers (\$34,830)	Secretaries & Administrative Assistants (\$39,370)	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, & Cosmetologists (\$30,265)	Industrial Engineers (\$82,415)
Home Health Aides (\$28,942)	Team Assemblers (\$34,098)	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers (\$63,297)	Market Research Analysts & Marketing Specs. (\$52,743)
Cooks, Restaurant (\$27,711)	Office Clerks, General (\$36,597)	Electricians (\$68,811)	Nurse Practitioners (\$107,387)
Maids & Housekeeping Cleaners (\$26,215)	Maintenance & Repair Workers (\$43,720)	Radiologic (X-Ray) Technologists (\$62,286)	Financial Managers (\$90,684)

Source: [DEED Occupations in Demand](#)

ECONOMY

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

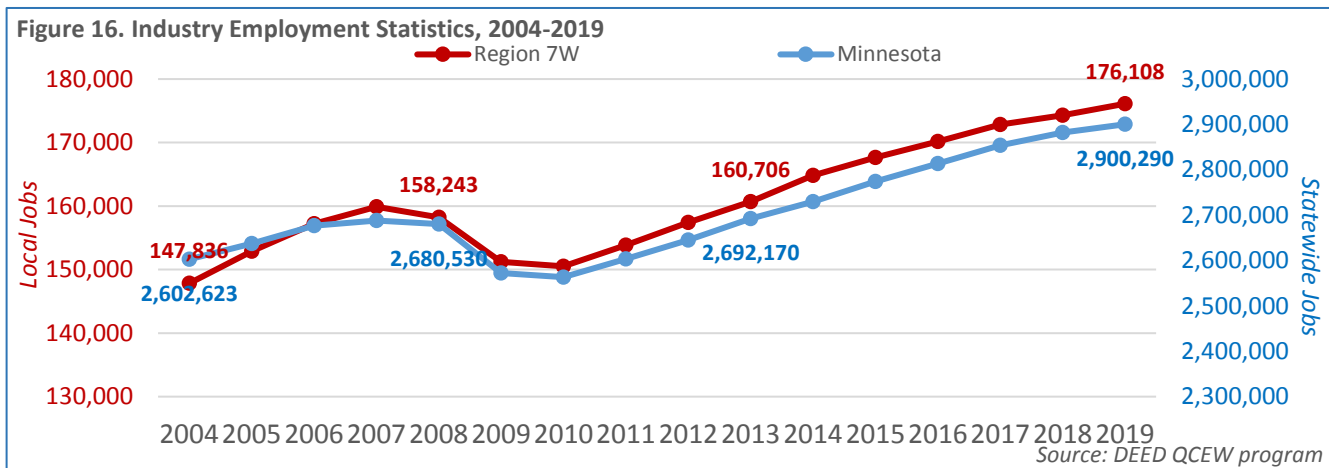
According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Region 7W was home to 10,872 business establishments providing 176,108 covered jobs through 2019, with a total payroll of just over \$8.2 billion. That was about 6.1 percent of total employment in the state of Minnesota, making it the third largest of the 13 EDRs in the state. Average annual wages were \$46,645 in the region, which was about \$13,000 lower than the state's average annual wage, and the third highest of the 13 EDRs.

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2014-2019		2018-2019	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Region 7W – Central	10,872	176,108	\$8,214,604,922	\$46,645	11,306	6.9%	1,822	1.0%
Benton Co.	996	17,422	\$767,993,316	\$44,082	237	1.4%	167	1.0%
Sherburne Co.	2,133	26,355	\$1,229,873,145	\$46,666	510	2.0%	210	0.8%
Stearns Co.	4,361	87,399	\$4,215,217,697	\$48,230	4,423	5.3%	527	0.6%
Wright Co.	3,383	44,932	\$2,001,520,764	\$44,546	6,137	15.8%	919	2.1%
State of Minnesota	178,242	2,900,290	\$172,936,995,226	\$59,627	170,677	6.3%	18,383	0.6%

Source: [DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\)](#)

Stearns County is the largest employment center in the region and the seventh largest in the state, with 87,399 jobs at 4,361 firms; accounting for about half of the region's jobs. Wright County was the next largest, with 44,932 jobs at 3,381 firms, followed by Sherburne County with 2,133 firms and 26,355 jobs and Benton County with 17,422 jobs at 996 firms. The city of St. Cloud is located in Stearns, Benton, and Sherburne County, and is the 10th largest city in the state. As shown above, the region recovered more quickly than the state over the past five years; with Wright County seeing the fastest rise in jobs (Table 13).

Region 7W has seen job gains and losses over the past decade, but ended 2019 with about 11,306 more jobs than it had in 2014, a 6.9 percent increase. In comparison, the state grew 6.3 percent from 2014 to 2019. Like the state, the region suffered severe job declines in 2009 and 2010. Since then, Region 7W has seen a faster recovery than the rest of the state, which gained jobs at a 0.6 percent clip from 2018 to 2019, compared to a 1 percent increase in the region. Also like the state, Region 7W regained all of the jobs lost during the recession by 2013 (Figure 16).



With 28,355 jobs at 1,073 firms, health care and social assistance is the largest employing industry in Region 7W, accounting for 16.1 percent of total jobs in the region. Due to the region's population growth, the largest sectors were ambulatory health care services and hospitals, which both had over 7,900 jobs and both were seeing significant growth since 2013. The region also had over 6,551 jobs in nursing and residential care facilities and over 4,200 jobs in social assistance.

After regaining about 1,879 jobs since 2014, manufacturing is still the second largest industry in Region 7W, with 26,041 jobs at 701 firms. Wages in manufacturing were over \$8,300 higher than in the total of all industries. In contrast, wages were relatively low in retail trade, the region's third largest industry, with 24,117 jobs at 1,347 stores. The related accommodation and food services industry had 13,468 jobs at 734 establishments, and also had low wages. Combined, those two industries provide 21 percent of total jobs.

With one of the largest student populations outside the Twin Cities, Region 7W also has a high concentration of jobs in educational services, with 15,835 jobs at 224 institutions – primarily at elementary and secondary schools, but also at junior colleges, universities, and other schools and instruction. The next largest industry was also the second fastest growing in the region from 2014 to 2019: the construction industry built up payrolls by 24 percent, and now has 13,424 jobs at 1,692 firms. The administrative support and waste management services industry, which includes temporary staffing agencies, cut almost 600 jobs since 2014. Other important industries in Region 7W include transportation and warehousing, wholesale trade, public administration, other services, finance and insurance, and professional and technical services. Fifteen of the 20 main industries in the region added jobs since 2014, however seven of 20 industries lost jobs in the past year (Table 14).

Table 14. Region 7W Industry Employment Statistics, 2019

NAICS Industry Title	2019 Annual Data			Avg. Annual Wage	2014-2019		2018-2019	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1000s)		Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	10,872	176,108	\$8,214,605	\$46,645	11,306	6.9%	1,822	1.0%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	190	2,140	\$79,199	\$37,009	408	23.6%	46	2.2%
Mining	12	268	\$17,315	\$64,607	64	31.4%	21	8.5%
Construction	1,692	13,424	\$881,314	\$65,652	2,599	24.0%	668	5.2%
Manufacturing	701	26,041	\$1,432,157	\$54,996	1,879	7.8%	401	1.6%
Utilities	28	1,708	\$196,841	\$115,246	-365	-17.6%	-78	-4.4%
Wholesale Trade	396	6,891	\$408,925	\$59,342	141	2.1%	42	0.6%
Retail Trade	1,347	24,117	\$713,579	\$29,588	1,340	5.9%	-259	-1.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	457	6,933	\$344,841	\$49,739	700	11.2%	132	1.9%
Information	127	1,931	\$108,451	\$56,163	-349	-15.3%	-23	-1.2%
Finance & Insurance	507	4,976	\$329,373	\$66,192	584	13.3%	107	2.2%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	358	1,440	\$48,306	\$33,546	-106	-6.9%	-49	-3.3%
Professional & Technical Services	717	4,184	\$255,691	\$61,112	617	17.3%	74	1.8%
Management of Companies	46	2,645	\$199,616	\$75,469	1,558	143.3%	1,525	136.2%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	497	7,240	\$258,757	\$35,740	-576	-7.4%	-73	-1.0%
Educational Services	224	15,835	\$746,650	\$47,152	683	4.5%	-8	-0.1%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,073	28,355	\$1,418,257	\$50,018	764	2.8%	-1,118	-3.8%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	221	2,029	\$29,608	\$14,593	232	12.9%	20	1.0%
Accommodation & Food Services	734	13,468	\$220,399	\$16,365	-165	-1.2%	-75	-0.6%
Other Services	1,342	5,849	\$161,807	\$27,664	816	16.2%	377	6.9%
Public Administration	206	6,632	\$363,520	\$54,813	483	7.9%	93	1.4%

Source: [DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\)](#)

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

According to DEED's Quarterly Employment Demographics (QED) program, the workforce in the region was aging over the past 10 years. Over one-in-five (20.8%) of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 21.5 percent statewide and just 14.4 percent in the region one decade earlier. In contrast, the percentage of teenaged workers was falling, and while wages were going up for younger workers, the number of hours worked was going down (Table 15).

As noted above, wages were climbing across the board for all workers due to rising demand and a tight labor market. While wages were still lowest for the youngest and oldest workers who tend to fill lower-skilled, less-than-fulltime jobs in industries like retail trade and accommodation and food services, these two age groups enjoyed the fastest percentage increase in wages from 2008 to 2018. Wages were highest for workers between 45 and 64 years of age, and males worked more hours than females, though the gap was narrowing.

Table 15. Workforce Demographics by Age Group and Gender, Total of All Industries, 2008-2018

Region 7W	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked (Per Qtr.)	
	2018	2008	2018	2008	2018	2008	2018	2008
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$18.16	\$14.06	412	398
19 years & under	8.8%	10.0%	6.1%	7.5%	\$10.50	\$7.51	122	124
20 to 24 years	11.7%	13.7%	10.3%	11.6%	\$14.34	\$10.67	274	269
25 to 44 years	40.1%	41.4%	42.9%	42.7%	\$20.76	\$16.40	464	461
45 to 54 years	18.5%	20.5%	19.1%	22.5%	\$22.62	\$17.61	480	480
55 to 64 years	15.9%	11.2%	16.7%	12.6%	\$21.15	\$16.42	480	454
65 years & over	4.9%	3.2%	4.8%	3.1%	\$15.14	\$11.33	224	189
Male	49.7%	48.4%	49.1%	49.0%	\$20.27	\$16.10	472	464
Female	50.3%	51.6%	50.9%	51.0%	\$17.07	\$12.80	364	346

Source: [DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics](#)

EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

People of color account for 11.2% of the total population in Central Minnesota and hold roughly the same share of jobs, compared to the state overall where they amount to 20.6% of the population but only hold 14.9% of jobs. According data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicator program people of color held 30,859 jobs compared to 251,243 jobs held by White Workers. The number of jobs has increased roughly threefold since 2000 when People of color held just 5% of jobs (See Figure 17).

People of color have filled an additional 19,551 jobs since 2000 compared to 47,620 by White workers, amounting to 41% of all new jobs. Hispanic/Latino workers hold the largest number of jobs of the racial and ethnic minority groups with 11,134 jobs in 2019, a third of all minority held jobs. The next largest number of jobs held by a minority group was Black or African American, holding 8,564 jobs in 2019. The number of jobs held by this race has increased by 6,739 since 2000, amounting to a 369% increase (See Figure 18).

The agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting sector and administrative support and waste management sector have the highest share of non-White employment at 24% and 20%, respectively. Accommodation and food services and manufacturing also have 15% of jobs held by non-white workers. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed by manufacturing (6,999 jobs) and healthcare and social assistance (5,796 jobs).

Figure 17. Employment of People of Color in Central Minnesota

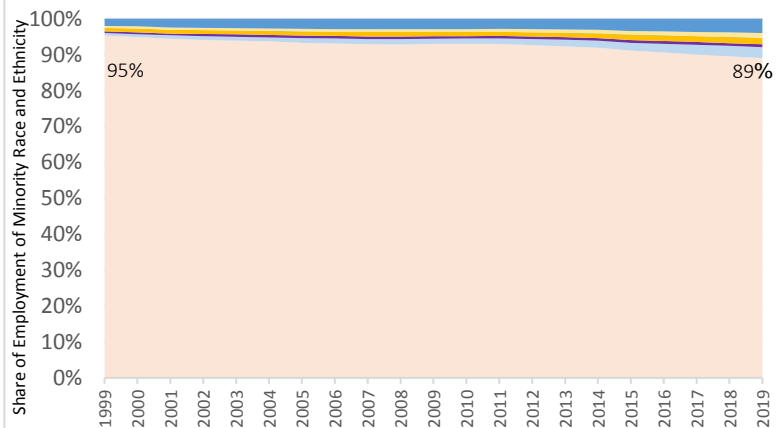


Figure 18. Employment of People of Color in Central Minnesota

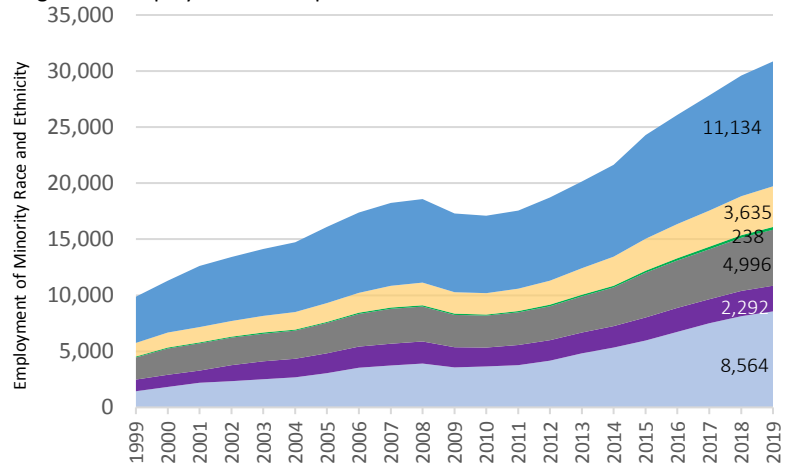
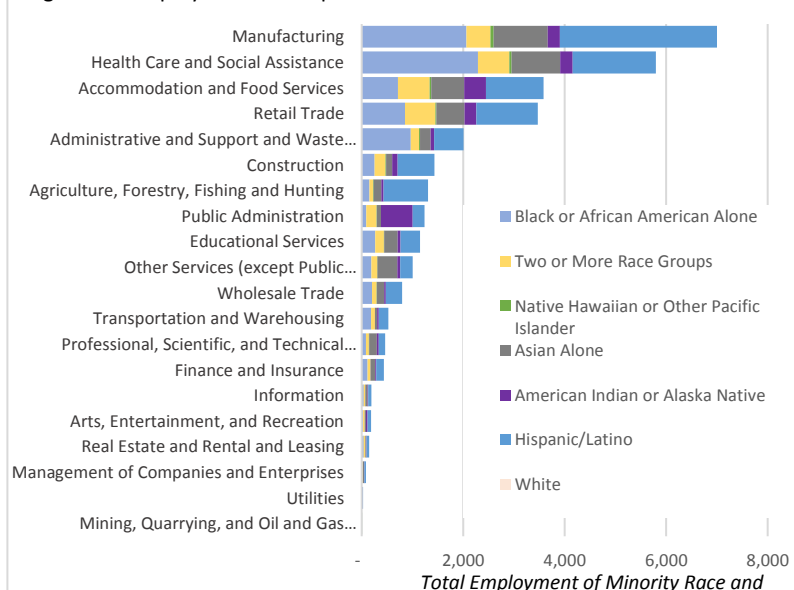


Figure 19. Employment of People of Color in Central Minnesota



Source: DEED, Census LEHD, QWI

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted above, Central Minnesota is projected to grow 8.6 percent from 2016 to 2026, a gain of 26,629 new jobs, which would make it the fastest growing region in the state. The largest and third fastest growing industry is expected to be health care and social assistance, which may account for one-third (35.1%) of total projected growth in the region by 2026. The region is also expected to see significant employment growth in construction, manufacturing, public administration, and retail trade. Construction and professional and technical services were projected to be the fastest growing. In contrast, agriculture, information, and mining are all expected to suffer job cuts in the next decade (Table 16).

Industry	Estimated Employment 2016	Projected Employment 2026	Percent Change 2016-2026	Numeric Change 2016-2026
Total, All Industries	310,433	337,062	+8.6%	+26,629
Health Care & Social Assistance	47,461	56,807	+19.7%	+9,346
Manufacturing	41,361	43,677	+5.6%	+2,316
Retail Trade	35,825	37,842	+5.6%	+2,017
Educational Services	25,717	26,325	+2.4%	+608
Accommodation & Food Services	21,568	22,458	+4.1%	+890
Construction	16,522	20,503	+24.1%	+3,981
Public Administration	18,239	20,261	+11.1%	+2,022
Other Services	11,569	12,024	+3.9%	+455
Transportation & Warehousing	10,210	11,568	+13.3%	+1,358
Wholesale Trade	10,237	11,189	+9.3%	+952
Administrative & Waste Services	9,834	10,892	+10.8%	+1,058
Professional & Technical Services	6,961	8,372	+20.3%	+1,411
Finance & Insurance	7,341	7,521	+2.5%	+180
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	5,562	5,683	+2.2%	+121
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	4,475	4,189	-6.4%	-286
Information	2,855	2,673	-6.4%	-182
Utilities	2,234	2,342	+4.8%	+108
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,965	1,981	+0.8%	+16
Management of Companies	1,681	1,763	+4.9%	+82
Mining	336	267	-20.5%	-69

Source: DEED 2016-2026 Employment Outlook

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Region 7W was home to 30,357 self-employed businesses or “nonemployers” in 2018, which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as “businesses without paid employees that are subject to federal income tax, originating from tax return information of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).” Unlike covered employment, Region 7W saw only a small increase in nonemployers over the past decade, responding to economic changes. In sum, the region added 1,205 nonemployers from 2007 to

	2018		2007-2018	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Firms	Percent Change
Region 7W	30,357	\$1,462,047	1,205	4.1%
Benton Co.	2,600	\$113,321	-55	-2.1%
Sherburne Co.	6,717	\$312,149	-237	-3.4%
Stearns Co.	11,153	\$593,461	1,204	12.1%
Wright Co.	9,887	\$443,116	293	3.1%
Minnesota	416,487	\$19,994,802	29,503	7.6%

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

2018, a 4.1 percent increase. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of over \$1.46 billion in 2018. Stearns and Wright County both added firms, while Benton and Sherburne lost firms (Table 17).

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Region 7W, including 5,606 farms producing just over \$1.2 billion in the market value of products sold in 2017 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. With almost 3,000 farms, Stearns County is the highest ranked agriculture county in the state. Like the state, the number of farms in the region declined over the past 5 years, but Region 7W still accounts for 20 percent of the farms in the state (Table 18).

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
Region 7W	5,606	\$1,241,259,000	7
Benton Co.	816	\$207,177,000	42
Sherburne Co.	501	\$89,597,000	60
Stearns Co.	2,951	\$747,977,000	1
Wright Co.	1,338	\$196,508,000	45
Minnesota	68,822	\$18,395,390,000	

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for people with disabilities by contacting Luke Greiner at 320-308-5378 or at luke.greiner@state.mn.us